

File documentation

County Urbanization Level Codes

A five-level county urbanization classification scheme was developed for the Urban and Rural Health Chartbook published in *Health United States, 2001* (1). The codes are based on 1990 Census data and standards for metropolitan areas as described in more detail below. This document provides: 1) the layout of the text file (available at this internet site) that contains the urbanization level code for each of the 3,142 counties or county equivalents in the United States, and 2) a definition of the urbanization levels.

File Layout (number of records=3,142)

Location	Size	Item	Format
1-2	2	FIPS State code	Numeric
3-5	3	FIPS county code	Numeric
7	1	<u>Region</u> 1=Northeast 2=Midwest 3=South 4=West	Numeric
9	1	<u>Urbanization level</u> 1=Large central metro 2=Large fringe metro 3=Small metro 4=Nonmetro with a city of at least 10,000 population 5=Nonmetro without a city of at least 10,000 population	Numeric
11-35	25	County name	Character

Modifications to urbanization codes. The urbanization level of the following five counties differs on this file from that used in the Urban and Rural Health Chartbook, as follows:

FIPS code	County name	Urbanization level in chartbook	Urbanization level in file
06059	Orange, CA	Large fringe metro	Large central metro
06097	Sonoma, CA	Large fringe metro	Small metro
13135	Gwinnett, GA	Large central metro	Large fringe metro
42103	Pike, PA	Large fringe metro	Small metro
55059	Kenosha, WI	Large fringe metro	Small metro

Definition of County Urbanization Levels

There are three urbanization levels for metropolitan counties and two for nonmetropolitan counties. All 3,142 U.S. counties and county equivalents were assigned to one of the five levels.

The three levels for metropolitan (metro) counties are:

- A) Large central
- B) Large fringe
- C) Small

The two levels for nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) counties are :

- D) With a city of 10,000 or more population
- E) Without a city of 10,000 or more population

Metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties

Metropolitan counties are those that are included in a metropolitan area. Nonmetropolitan counties are those that are not included in a metropolitan area.

Metropolitan areas

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) defines metropolitan areas according to published standards that are applied to Census Bureau data. The general concept of a metropolitan area is that of a core area containing a population nucleus, together with additional communities having a high degree of economic and social integration with that core. Standard definitions for metropolitan areas were first issued in 1949 and were modified in 1958, 1971, 1975, 1980, 1990, and December, 2000 (to be applied to the 2000 census data). The most currently defined metropolitan areas are based on application of the 1990 standards .

The collective term “metropolitan area” became effective with the 1990 standards (2). Metropolitan areas include metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), consolidated metropolitan statistical areas (CMSAs), and primary metropolitan statistical areas (PMSAs).

The 1990 standards specify that an MSA must include 1) at least one city with 50,000 or more inhabitants or 2) a Census Bureau-defined urbanized area of at least 50,000 inhabitants and a total metropolitan population of at least 100,000 (75,000 in New England). In addition to the county/counties that contain the largest city, an MSA also includes counties that have a large portion of their population living in the urbanized area surrounding the largest city or that meet specified commuting and metropolitan character requirements.

If an MSA has a population of 1 million or more and meets requirements specified in the standards, it is termed a CMSA, consisting of two or more major components recognized as PMSAs.

The 1990 standards specify that the largest city in an MSA/CMSA be designated as a “central city”. Additional cities qualify as central cities if requirements concerning population size and commuting patterns are met.

Assignment of counties to the urbanization levels

Assignment of the 3,142 counties/county equivalents to the five urbanization levels was based on their classification in the Urban Influence code system (December 1996 Revision) developed by the Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture (3). The categorization of counties as metropolitan or nonmetropolitan in the Urban Influence code system is based on the June, 1993 OMB definition of metropolitan areas (the application of the 1990 metropolitan area standards to the 1990 decennial census data).

Urbanization levels for metropolitan counties. The Urban Influence code system classifies metropolitan counties as either **large metro** (county is in an MSA/PMSA of 1 million or more population) or **small metro** (county is in an MSA/PMSA of less than 1 million population). The large metro category of the Urban Influence code system was divided into two urbanization levels: large central metro and large fringe metro. Thus, metro counties were assigned to one of three urbanization levels as follows:

Large central metro - A county in a large (1 million or more population) MSA/PMSA was assigned to this urbanization level if it contains all or part of the largest central city of the MSA/PMSA.

Large fringe metro- A county in a large (1 million or more population) MSA/PMSA was assigned to this urbanization level if it does not contain any part of the largest central city of the MSA/PMSA. Note: counties in a few PMSAs with less than 1 million population were assigned to the large fringe urbanization level because the PMSA in which they are located is adjacent to a large central county of the CMSA.

Small metro - A county was assigned to this urbanization level if it was in a small (less than 1 million population) MSA/PMSA.

Urbanization levels for nonmetropolitan counties. The Urban Influence code system divides nonmetropolitan counties into seven categories based on adjacency to a metropolitan area and size of the largest city. A county is considered to have a city with a specified size if it includes all or part of the city. These seven categories were collapsed into two categories: **nonmetro counties with a city of 10,000 or more population** and **nonmetro counties without a city of 10,000 or more population**. The categories were collapsed based on size of city rather than on adjacency to a metropolitan area because the effect of small cities in nonmetro areas is particularly important as their presence or absence affects health service availability.

References

1. Eberhardt MS, Ingram DD, Makuc DM, et al. Urban and Rural Health Chartbook. Health, United States, 2001. Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics. 2001.
2. Federal Register, Vol 55 No. 82. March 30, 1990.
3. Ghelfi Lm, Parker TS. A new county level measure of urban influence. Staff Report, Rural Economy Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. 1995.